

## Two years after inception, Career Couture Boutique thrives in Suffolk

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*The Career Couture Boutique carries shoes, handbags, accessories and clothing for men and women embarking on job interviews. Photo from June Kirby*

**By Alex Petroski**

They say you should dress for the job you want, not the job you have. For those who are unemployed, that can be a difficult proposition. Like anything else, business wear is not getting any less expensive. In Suffolk County, residents have a valuable resource at their disposal if they're seeking a job but don't have the means to buy a suit, dress or other professional attire.

Two years ago, led by County Executive Steve Bellone (D) and the Department of Labor, the Career Couture Boutique was born. Located in the One-Stop Employment Center at the William J. Lindsay County Complex in Hauppauge, the boutique is full of donated, lightly worn business attire for both men and women.

### A fairy godmother at the helm

**June Kirby**, a 20-year county employee, was hand picked to run the boutique two years ago. She said it was just an empty room back then, but after building shelves and stocking the donated items, the boutique now resembles an upscale shopping experience.



Kirby estimated she has fitted somewhere in the neighborhood of 900 people in the boutique's two-year existence, and though there isn't an official notification process when customers of the boutique find jobs, she said about 50 percent have gotten back to her with news they've been hired.

"It's very rewarding," Kirby said in a phone interview last Tuesday. "You see the difference of a person's self-esteem. They finally are getting the interviews. This is basically the last step before they go on to the interviews."

*Clients re-entering the workforce are given a complete makeover at the Career Couture Boutique.*

### From the kindness of others

The boutique gets customers based on referrals from veterans shelters, family service organizations, other nonprofits and walk-ins. Everything is donated to the boutique, and, when job-seekers are fitted, they are given the clothing, free of charge and without the need to return it.

Sport Clips, Long Island Beauty School and other local salons donate coupons for haircuts and manicures to complete the job interview preparation process. Most of the items come from dry cleaners and private donors.

"I receive a lot of donations," Kirby said. "It's in the thousands. Whatever I do not utilize, I donate."

Nonprofit organization EAC Network, whose mission is to empower, assist and care for people in need, partnered with the boutique to assist in donation collections. Kirby said the organization has been a valuable resource to keep the boutique running smoothly.



The One-Stop Employment Center also offers residents assistance with resumes, job searches, practice questions with mock interviews and more.

"We are proud to be able to add this service to what we offer those residents looking for work or new careers," Bellone said in a press release when the boutique opened in 2014.

Noted Kirby, "To me it's very important that people look their best because when they look their best, they feel their best."

The Career Couture Boutique, located in the One-Stop Employment Center at 725 Veterans Memorial Highway, Hauppauge, is open Monday to Friday from 8:30 a.m. to 4 p.m.

